

TO: FCC Commissioner

RE: Docket 05-235, Retaining Morse Code Proficiency for Amateur Radio Licensing

Dear Sir:

No doubt you've received many pro and con letters on the subject of retaining or eliminating Morse Code proficiency testing from Amateur radio licensure requirements. Here is another.

According to a recently released FCC report, you and your distinguished colleagues have reviewed numerous petitions, letters, memos, etc., on the subject of Morse Code proficiency and decided, "in the best interest of Amateur Radio," to eliminate the requirement. This equates to sounding a death knell to the accomplishments of all past and present licensed amateurs who spent countless hours learning and practicing the code in preparation for that day when they passed their test and earned their license. It is a noteworthy accomplishment to be granted membership to as prestigious organization as the organization of licensed radio amateurs and not everyone is or will ever be qualified to join!

Perhaps in your younger day, you Sir, may have been a Boy Scout, a member of a fraternity or some other formal organization, perhaps even a distinguished graduate from your high school or college. Now, as commissioner of the FCC, you have reached a pinnacle in your career for which you can be justifiably proud! What is my point? We pay a price for every success in our lives whether it be the time spent studying for an exam or practicing a speech when we would rather be watching television to the physical exertion of swimming countless laps, lifting weights or hitting a punching bag in preparation for the big sports competition. Why do we do these things? Quite simply, it's all about accomplishing personal goals.

I remember struggling to learn the Morse Code as a young teenager. I had two reasons for learning. One was to satisfy a requirement for the Boy Scout Signaling merit badge and the other to give me what is perceived by some to be the single most complicated skill necessary to earn an Amateur Radio License. I like emphasizing the word earn, as I once held a Citizens Band Radio License. The only thing I had to earn to receive the license was the 20 dollar license fee. Eliminating the code test from the amateur radio licensing system will, in effect, be removing the one element of amateur advancement that separates the men from the boys or the women from the girls. I never met a ham who boasted of "learning the code" in a few hours or days, even to pass the simple 5 word per minute Novice Class code test. Rather they spent weeks, months or, in my case, nearly two years!

In the early 1970s, a number of "broadcasting schools" sprang up in the Kansas City area. Their purpose? To teach a "student" how to retain sufficient knowledge long

enough to take and pass the Second and First Class Commercial Radiotelephone Operator's license exam. My friends who worked as disk jockeys at a local AM radio station paid big bucks to attend one of these schools. They had little interest in electronics or radio theory but enjoyed their jobs and were willing to expend the necessary effort to keep them! Six months after testing, they couldn't remember the difference between the schematic symbol for a light bulb and a capacitor! My point in this discussion is that learning Morse Code sufficiently to pass the code portion of any amateur license exam is not the same as cramming for a written exam but more closely resembles learning to ride a bicycle. It is a skill that requires a strong desire to learn on the part of the individual and many hours of practice to master. Once learned, it seems to be permanently ingrained in one's brain. Over the years, I've talked via Morse Code, to hams who were recovering stroke victims. None ever complained of having to relearn code but rather how to retrain their body so they could, in most cases send code with the "other hand." All viewed this re-training as an excellent motivational and therapeutic tool. Another popular topic of past discussions was whether remaining proficient in Morse Code could help ward off the onset of Alzheimer's disease among Ham Radio operators. Having talked to more than one 90+ year old ham via Morse Code, my conclusion is anything's possible!

You disagreed with one of the petitioner's argument for retaining code proficiency requirements on the grounds that continuous wave (CW) communications are outdated and have been superseded by so many modern advancements in the communications world. Of what were you referring? Cell phones? Cell phones with built in video cameras? During the recent June 2005 Amateur Radio Field Day, my battery operated Morse Code only ham radio rig allowed me to make contact with other hams operating under similar field conditions as far away as California and Maine. At the same time, none of my cell phones would even connect with the nearest repeater tower less than 20 miles away. Similar situations existed during the post-Hurricane Katrina period. Without an intact repeater tower infrastructure, cell phones in New Orleans were worthless.

Years ago, my father lay dying in the intensive care ward of a local hospital, connected to a breathing machine, unable to speak and struggling to spell letters of his last communication with little success into the palm of my mother's hand. I so wished he knew Morse code as he could have tapped the letters into the palm of my hand, communicated via eye blink, etc. Years later when I was connected to a ventilator and unable to speak, my immediate family knew how to convert the tapping or eye blinking into meaningful letters.

Amateur radio is not meant for everyone. Being a "Ham Radio" operator requires a certain amount of skill, not only in learning the fundamentals of electronic theory, but in learning how to send and receive in Morse Code at the astonishing rate of 5 words per minute. That's roughly one letter every 2.5 seconds! We speak at speeds measured in the hundreds of words per minute and think at speeds measured in the

thousands! Why then, would there appear to be such a sizeable group opposing a new method of communication that requires one to hear and process information at the astonishing rate of one letter every 2.5 seconds?

Many of the reasons given for eliminating the Morse Code proficiency requirement from Amateur Radio Licensing stem from a want or need to streamline the licensure paperwork trail, reduce the need to provide straightforward guidance to volunteer examiners and eliminate the perceived "unfairness" or burden of learning Morse for those with real or imaginary handicaps or a lack of commitment to learn. Not everything in life is fair to everyone. If it were, we would all be exactly the same, possess no initiative to improve and, in time, wither and die off as a civilization. Fortunately, we are all born with individual talents and, in many cases, a will to learn new skills, exceed personal goals and fulfill our dreams.

Only those willing to take the time to acquire the skills necessary to be a licensed amateur radio operator should be granted the privilege just as only those willing to acquire the skills to become a medical doctor are granted licenses to practice. My cardiologist seldom listens to my heart with her stethoscope. She has a nurse do that. In fact, she seldom does anything except ask how I feel, prescribe medicines and collect sizeable fees! Therefore, my daughter, who learned patient communication skills and how to use a stethoscope while in nurses training, should be allowed to skip the hours, months or years of specialized medical training and, if able to pass a written test, receive a full fledged medical degree to go along with her Nursing diploma. I know she would appreciate being called "Doctor" without earning the privilege.

Please reconsider your logic for eliminating Morse Code requirements. As a nation, we are facing a continuing crisis in the education of our population. Why do you suppose that is? How is it a New York City high school graduate is accepted into a prestigious college and then, after failing to progress, successfully sues his former high school for failing to teach him how to read? The answer lies in what is expected, how learning is measured and how many waivers are granted. While one may be able to fake reading a book, pay someone else to complete a homework or research paper assignment, cheat on a math exam, etc., being proficient in sending and receiving Morse Code is easy to measure and under controlled conditions, impossible to fake.

I realize only a small percentage of the US population aspire to become licensed radio operators. For those campaigning to eliminate code proficiency requirements, obtaining an amateur radio license may equate to another certificate of achievement to hang on their "I Love Me" wall, especially if the effort to obtain one is suddenly made significantly easier. Must the FCC Commissioner possess any special educational degrees to be eligible for the position? If necessary, I could, for

about \$200 dollars, earn a PhD based on life experiences from a fully accredited (at least they claim to be) Internet University!

For those of us who took the time to become proficient in sending and receiving Morse Code at 5, 13 or 20 WPM and learned enough about electronics theory and communications law to pass our respective Amateur exams, please don't further cheapen our accomplishments by removing the one remaining special talent that makes the Ham Radio license something special, namely the ability to receive and send Morse Code at a minimum of 5 WPM. As always, those who don't wish to expend the effort to learn the code can continue using handy talkies on VHF/UHF repeater bands while those not wishing to expend any effort other than learning the jargon, can still buy Citizens Band radio equipment or illegally acquire and operate Amateur Radio equipment as they already do.

Thank You

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